



Practically Joking

Moira Marsh

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In *Practically Joking*, the first full-length study of the practical joke, Moira Marsh examines the value, artistry, and social significance of this ancient and pervasive form of vernacular expression.

Though they are sometimes dismissed as the lowest form of humor, practical jokes come from a lively tradition of expressive play. They can reveal both sophistication and intellectual satisfaction, with the best demanding significant skill and talent not only to conceive but also to execute. *Practically Joking* establishes the practical joke as a folk art form subject to critical evaluation by both practitioners and audiences, operating under the guidance of local aesthetic and ethical canons.

Marsh studies the range of genres that pranks comprise; offers a theoretical look at the reception of practical jokes based on “benign transgression”—a theory that sees humor as playful violation—and uses real-life examples of practical jokes in context to establish the form’s varieties and meanings as an independent genre, as well as its inextricable relationship with a range of folklore forms. Scholars of folklore, humor, and popular culture will find much of interest in *Practically Joking*.

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